

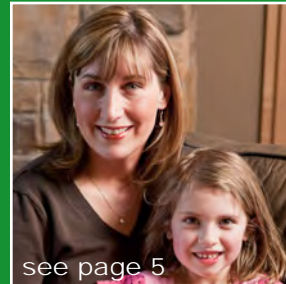
Madison area
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Bugabees Help Kids5

BugaBees help kids understand food allergies

■ *By Angela Mihm Nigro for Neighbors*

When Amy and Scott Recob discovered that their daughter, Mollie, was severely allergic to peanuts and tree nuts, it started a chain reaction. Naturally, the couple's first instinct was to protect Mollie by regulating her exposure to dangerous foods, but preschool, birthday parties, and other social events quickly entered the picture and that job became more challenging.

"Even though we would always provide safe food substitutes for Mollie, she still felt excluded from the other kids," says Amy. "I wanted to find a way to show her that missing out on certain foods didn't mean missing out on all the fun."

Recob used her real-life experiences to write a book, "The BugaBees: Friends with Food Allergies," showing that in spite of a food allergy, children can lead happy, normal lives. Out and about, these adorable little BugaBees find ways to stay safe, have fun, and discover that the joy of friendship is far sweeter than any food they can or can't have.

Inspiration from the title came from Mollie herself, often called "Little BugaBoo," and from there, eight characters were born. Each BugaBee has a different allergy, thus comprising the eight that make up 90 percent of all allergic reactions: peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, milk, soy, eggs and wheat. The captivating illustrations and clever rhyming verse help children learn to safely participate in everyday activities without a sense of exclusion.

When writing the book, Amy often engaged Mollie, then age three, in the creative process. "I'd ask her, 'Mollie, do you think we should make this bug a cricket or a grasshopper?'" She picked Cricket, and that's what we went with," she recalls. In the end, the book is a perfect blend of learning and fun.



BugaBees empowers children to say, "No thank you" to foods that might be dangerous for them and also encourages the child and those around her to ask lots of questions about the food's source. The idea of being completely open is important, says Katie Dougherty whose 7-year-old daughter Brooke also suffers from severe food allergies.

In the classroom, Dougherty encourages teachers to make a full disclosure of Brooke's allergies to the other children. "The other kids don't tease her. In fact, they watch out for her and make sure she's included with things that are safe for her," Dougherty says.

The book, available at Oompa Toys, Barnes and Noble, and Capitol Kids on the Square closes with talking points about allergy warning signs, dangerous foods for each allergy and most importantly, how to have fun together outside of eating. Supported by a web site, the BugaBees continue education with additional resources online at www.thebugabees.com